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ABSTRACT

This guidebook for Hispanic parents offers suggestions for supporting their children as they develop socially and academically. It covers various parental responsibilities such as their children's health, talking with their children, reading and listening to their children, and using the community and home as learning environments. It also suggests the different ways that parents can form partnerships with the schools, including making sure homework is finished, seeing that their children regularly visit the library, meeting with teachers and counselors regularly, and participating in the school's volunteer activities. (MYM)

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# DEAR PARENTS:

## In the United States...

## IT'S OUR SCHOOL TOO

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Hispanic Dropout Project

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UD 027 470

*The Parents and Grandparents of*

**The Hispanic Policy Development Project**
*and*
**Taller LatinoAmericano**

*respectfully dedicate this little book to:*

**THE PARENTS OF:**

FIRST NAME_____Grade_____

LAST NAME _____

ADDRESS_____

TELEPHONE_____

TEACHER_____

SCHOOL_____

SCHOOL TELEPHONE NO._____

OTHER IMPORTANT NUMBERS:

_____

_____

_____

This is me!

(Photograph or Self Portrait)

## DEAR PARENTS:

Education is the key to our children's future. Without an education, our children lack opportunities:

- to find good jobs
- to earn a good salary
- to fully participate in the activities of their communities.

### TODAY, WE ARE FACING A CRISIS

40% of U.S. Hispanic youth drop out of high school

### AND WHAT IS EVEN WORSE...

25% of Hispanic youth who graduate, have not acquired adequate skills.

This means that.....

-- **65%** of our children are going out into the world unprepared.

How can this be happening, when we as parents worry so much about their future?

What can we do to make sure that our children aspire to the best jobs, and compete equally with other youths?

What is the secret to academic success in U.S. schools?

**Dear Parents—**

The secret is that in the U.S. --

**—THE PARENTS, THE CHILDREN AND THE SCHOOLS FUNCTION AS AN EDUCATION TEAM.**

All of the members of the team—**teachers, children and parents**—play important roles that contribute to the students' academic success.

It is very important that we continue teaching our children our basic values. We should not forget our roots; we must protect our traditions and culture. But at the same time we must join the PARENT/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP EDUCATION TEAM and accept new tasks in order to give our children the support they need to become successful students. In the United States—

## IT'S OUR SCHOOL TOO.

## IN OUR COUNTRIES IT IS DIFFERENT.

In Latin countries, responsibility for education is usually left in the hands of the professionals—the teachers. In fact, most teachers prefer that parents do not involve themselves in the school's work.

The parents in our countries are responsible for teaching children the basic values of honor, the family, and discipline.

It is the parents' responsibility to send their children to school well behaved. In addition, from the time a baby is born through adolescence, parents are responsible for that child's physical and mental well being.

For example—

**IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS TO—**

1 - Take their children for **regular visits to the doctor** for checkups. A child needs protection against illness and disease ( i.e. inoculations, vaccinations, preventive medical care).

2 - Take their children to the **eye doctor** once a year. A child who has problems with his eyes, will be unable to see the blackboard or read the school books; and he will struggle with his class work.

3 - Take their children to the **dentist** in order to maintain, clean, healthy and strong teeth.

4 - Make certain that children have **adequate rest.** Children must have a set bedtime to assure that they sleep a minimum of ten hours.

5 - Provide their children with a **balanced diet** .

Breakfast is one of the most important meals of the day, especially for school-age children.

A child who goes to school hungry will neither pay attention to the teacher nor to the day's lessons.

All the responsibilities listed above are those we are accustomed to fulfilling.

But, what we, as parents, sometimes do not realize is that in U.S. schools the teachers expect parents to teach their children certain basic skills before they enter school.

For example—

U.S. schools expect children to enter kindergarten or the first grade with the following skills:

- the ability to recognize and know letters and numbers;
- knowledge of colors and shapes;
- an understanding of the value and use of money;
- knowledge of family personal information -- name, address, etc.
- the ability to tell time, to know the days of the week, the months of the year;
- the ability to listen, follow simple instructions, and reply to questions.

Children should also come to school with a wide and varied vocabulary;
they should be familiar with the concept of reading, and they should be able—

- to arrange things in categories, and
- to form opinions in order to resolve simple problems.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE ALL THIS?

## Here's How....

**Talking with our children–**
Language development begins in the crib. A child learns to talk by listening to the spoken word. The repetition of sounds and words when parents talk with their children awakens a child's natural ability to understand and speak.

Conversations with children must be constant:

- when we dress them;
- when we feed them;
- when we bath them; and
- when we play with them.

When a child begins to talk, **THE INTERACTIVE PROCESS BETWEEN A CHILD AND AN ADULT** is very important. This is the time when it is vital to talk with children as much as possible, to respond to their questions and to stimulate and encourage the use of a wide variety of words.

**Reading to our children so that they–**

- learn to appreciate books;
- learn the alphabet and the sounds of letters;
- become aware, in time, that letters form words.

Children acquire new vocabulary by listening to stories—in English or in Spanish—and by looking at the pages of books. They learn to identify objects, and find new ways of saying things and explaining actions.

**Using our community as a school–**

- when we go shopping, we can talk to our children about the things we purchase;
- when we ride the bus we can talk about the streets, the stores, the people we see, and even the weather.

**Using our home as a school–**

- to explain to our children the names and use of things: like the furniture, windows, clothing, the telephone; objects found in the kitchen: like the plates, the refrigerator; the names of foods: like milk, bread, fruits, and so on.
- to sing and dance with our children, and to teach them simple tasks around the house, for example, how to put away their toys.

**Listening to our children**—Although we **hear** our children when they speak, we don't always **listen** to what they are saying. We should always listen to our children when they want to talk with us or to tell us something, and we should try to answer their questions even when we are busy. A child's curiosity and the need to ask questions are basic elements in the learning process. We must stimulate them.

—And the most important thing is—**Making sure that our children have self esteem and self confidence.** With words and actions we can communicate our love, trust, and support for our children. By always remembering to compliment them —by telling them how marvelous, intelligent, handsome/pretty, and even how funny they are —we convey the happiness we feel that they are ours. We must make them feel good about themselves.

In conclusion—

- Youngsters who arrive in school with the basic skills;
- Youngsters who know that the school and their parents work together; and
- Youngsters who know that their parents have an interest and faith in them,

**—ARE YOUNGSTERS WHO WILL REACH THEIR GOALS—**

## PARENTS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SCHOOLS

**Because the secret to academic success means becoming involved in the PARENT/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP EDUCATION TEAM,** we must establish a direct relationship with the schools our children attend as soon as they are enrolled—

• because—as our children's first teachers, we must understand the goals and methods of the educational system;

• because—our children's teachers need to understand our customs, aspirations and dreams;

• because—the teachers are not the only ones responsible for our children's academic success or failure.

We must continue to support our children to assure their success in school.

As members of the **PARENT/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP EDUCATION TEAM, we must assume new tasks and responsibilities when our children enter school.**

For example—

**Homework** is assigned to children to review the lessons that they have studied in class during the day. It is a way of reinforcing what they are learning. For this reason, it is important that children do their homework. When children get home, parents should ask them what they learned in class, and whether they have homework (or reading, studying, etc.), and ask them if they need help with their assignments.

**Homework** should be done as soon as possible when children get home, in a a quiet place where a child can concentrate. **Homework**—or studying— should not be done in front of the T.V. After children finish their homework, it is a good idea to check the work and ask friendly questions relating to the assignment, complimenting them on jobs well done.

Visits to the library

It is important that children visit the library on a regular basis. As soon as children enter first grade, they should have library cards that allow them to borrow books they can take home; parents should set aside time every day to read to their children.

We should encourage the idea that READING IS A PLEASURE. Then children will read on their own without being asked.

**Educational activities with parents are very important–**

Children should have play time. Everything can't be work. After children do their homework and chores around the house, they can:

- play alone, or with friends
- listen to music
- watch TV—**as long the program is educational, or at least nonviolent.**

And, we can play word cames with our children, and ask them to help us write the grocery lists.

**Recreational activities during the weekend can include visits to–**
museums • theatres • parks • the zoo

Other families and children can come along on these outings.

There are also groups like "Little League," "Girl Scouts" and Boy Scouts," as well as church and community centers which provide a variety of recreational activities for children at little or no cost.

DEAR PARENTS—

When we stay away from schools—

• because we believe that we don't have a role in the education process—or

• because we think, mistakenly, that we cannot contribute to our children's education because we lack formal education—

**—we are hurting the teachers and our own children.**

When we are not present to serve as guides, our children and their teachers navigate the sea of learning without certain basic information that only we, the family, can provide.

For that reason we must:

## PARTICIPATE IN ACTIVITIES RELATED TO OUR CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Although it is true that our jobs and everyday responsibilities take up many hours of our day, whenever possible, we should participate in activities that strengthen our relationship with the school and show that we are interested in the education and academic progress of our children.

**Direct and frequent communication with the teachers—**

It is very important that parents and teachers communicate with one another frequently in order to discuss a child's progress, problems or special needs.

For example—

• give the teacher your home telephone number and indicate that you want to be kept informed about anything relating to your child;

• get into the habit of talking with teachers when you see them in school or when you pick up or drop off your children.

**Teacher and parent conferences to discuss our children's academic progress, and workshops–**

- to discuss discipline and behavior problems;
- to learn how to listen and respond to our children;
- to understand the rules and regulations of the U.S. education system;
- to learn how to help our children at home with math, and other subjects.

**Special school programs, like family reunions, holiday celebrations, and graduation ceremonies–**

**Regular meetings with counselors–**
—especially during the junior high and the high school years. These are the years when our youth elect the academic courses which will determine what they will be studying.

**We must be very careful about the options we and our children consider during these years because the choices we make will have a profound affect on our children's future opportunities.**

## WE MUST ALSO PARTICIPATE IN THE SCHOOLS' VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

## DEAR PARENTS—

As members of the SCHOOL/PARENT PARTNERSHIP EDUCATION TEAM it is our responsibility to participate in volunteer activities. There are a variety of activities that require parental assistance. Naturally, our personal situations influence how and when we can become involved.

Parents can participate in activities such as:

- helping the teachers in the classrooms;
- answerng the telephones or filing in the office;
- serving lunch or supervising the children in the lunch room;
- preparing meals for school functions;
- helping to paint a classroom, or moving furniture;
- sewing costumes for school plays; or
- serving as a guide or host for newly arrived families.

And, finally we can...PARTICIPATE IN THE SCHOOL'S DECISION-MAKING MECHANISMS

Once we have established relations with the school, and after we understand and feel comfortable in the school setting, we can take the last step and become members of the policy-making committees of the school.

This is how we directly influence the decisions that affect the function and operation of the school.

For example—

- We can **serve as members** of the parents/ teachers organizations—(P.T.A., P.A.C.);
- We can **join campaigns** to elect school officials;
- We can **stand for election** for school office, and
- **We must vote in school elections.**

**THIS IS NOT ONLY OUR RIGHT;**
**IT IS OUR OBLIGATION!**

## DEAR PARENTS—

As families concerned for the future of our children, we cannot allow 65% of our Hispanic youth, "...to go out into the world unprepared."

To insure the academic success of our children in the North American education system, we must join the PARENT/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP EDUCATION TEAM.

Our team participation and our vote can fundamentally influence the future success of our children.

**Never forget, here in the United States**

**IT'S OUR SCHOOL TOO!**

Respectfully,

The Parents and Grandparents of the
Hispanic Policy Development Project
April 1990

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Our participation in the **PARENT/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP EDUCATION TEAM** and our vote can fundamentally influence the future success of our children.

END

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